


LTG Joseph L. Yakovac Jr. Discusses Key Workforce Issues

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On March 29, 2005, Military Deputy (MILDEP) to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology (AL&T) and Director of Acquisition Career Management (DACM) LTG Joseph L. Yakovac Jr. provided his thoughts on key workforce issues.

LTG Joseph L. Yakovac Jr., MILDEP/DACM, discusses technology integration with MG Michael R. Mazzuchi, Communications-Electronics Life Cycle Management Command Commanding General, at Fort Monmouth, NJ. (Photo by Greg Brower.)

Q. Why is counseling a supervisor's most important duty? What can supervisors do to help you grow future AL&T Workforce leaders?

A. Counseling is an unnatural act. It makes us uncomfortable and nobody likes to do it. In most cases, we — both military and civilian — find all the excuses in the world to avoid it. It's just not pleasant. In fact, historically, we normally only counsel those folks who have done something so bad that they need counseling, and it's obvious to everyone within the organization that they need it. But when it comes to performance counseling in general, we collectively do a very poor job of it. Now in the aggregate, I don't think we will ever be able to break the code of getting people to be comfortable with counseling. Even with as much work as the Army has done on its Officer Evaluation Report system — and making counseling and mentoring a

mandatory part of it — it's been very difficult for the Army to execute effective counseling on the green suit side. I have no unrealistic expectations that I can change how people view counseling overnight.

There are 40,000-plus civilians in the AL&T Workforce and no one person can manage that many people. There has to be a core group of workers out there who — from a supervisory standpoint — are the ones who current supervisors know from their personalities, desires and drives would rise to the challenge of moving up into acquisition leadership positions. Some people don't want the challenge. They've reached a plateau, are perfectly comfortable being

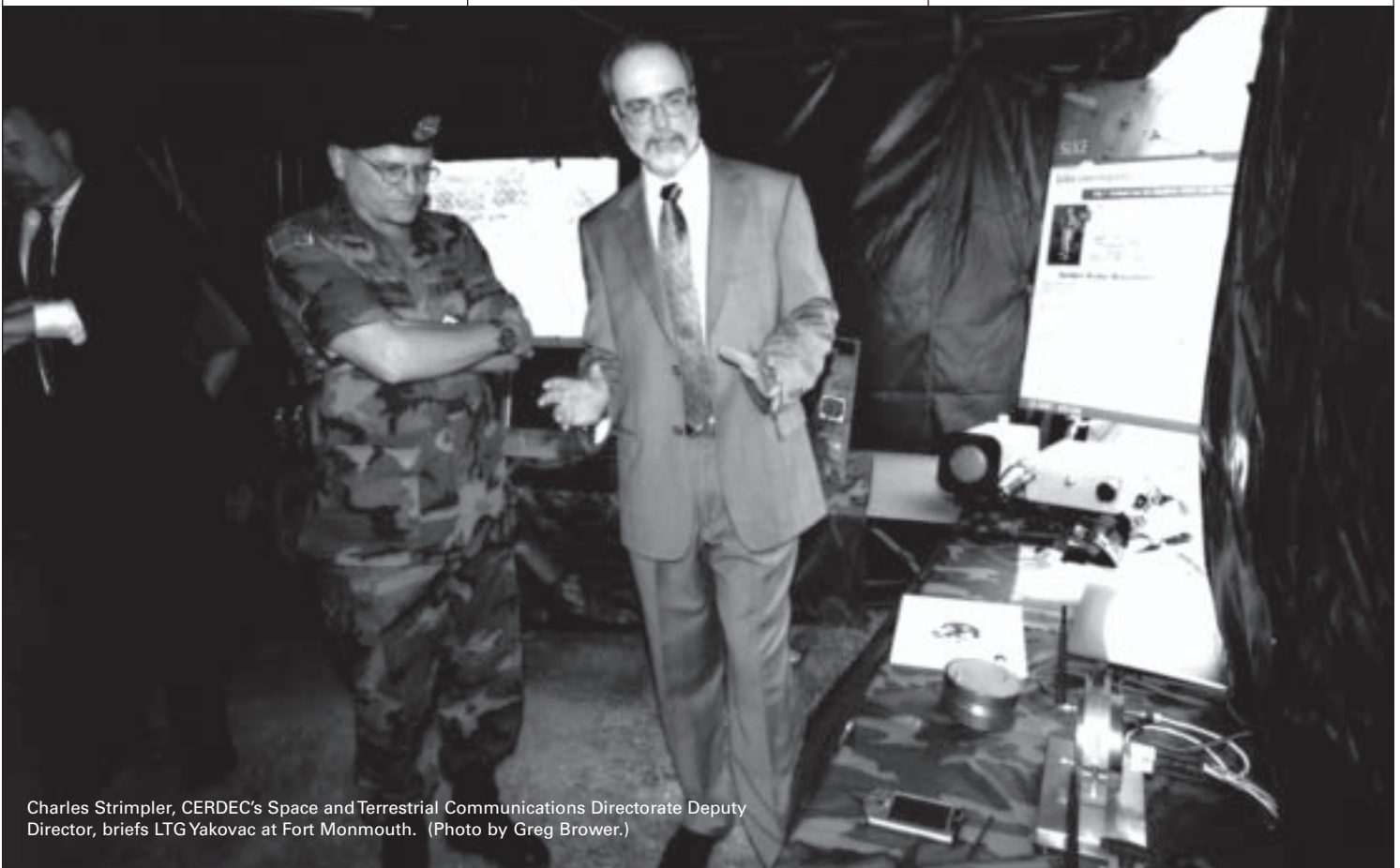
a GS-14 and don't want to be a product or project manager (PM).

What I'd like to do, in terms of counseling, is to seek out those AL&T

Workforce members who want to take on PM responsibilities and become the Army Acquisition Corps' (AAC's) future leaders. Not everyone wants to do that. So for the core group of people who do, we can focus on their professional development and training to help them shape their careers and leadership potential for tomorrow's AAC challenges.

It's much easier to manage the military workforce because there are only 1,600 acquisition officers. We shape their careers by diverse assignments and, by

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Charles Strimpler, CERDEC's Space and Terrestrial Communications Directorate Deputy Director, briefs LTG Yakovac at Fort Monmouth. (Photo by Greg Brower.)



LTG Yakovac emphasizes a point during a Meet the MILDEP presentation. Visits such as these help the DACM put the "personal back in personnel management" as he discusses pertinent workforce issues and professional development policy initiatives with acquisition community members. (Photo by Greg Brower.)

frequently moving them, we get a broader base of people evaluating them over time. In contrast, our civilians, in most cases, have just one supervisor evaluating each one over a longer period of time.

For the future, what we must do is make a commitment to the civilians displaying the most potential to be future leaders. We must manage them differently and say, "Look you're going to stay with me for 3 years, but then I want to get you a job over here." This process will only be successful through the use of quality performance counseling.

Good performance counseling can make a significant impact on career management by discovering the ambitions of those who want to be PMs or AAC leaders. If we can get that message instilled in our current civilian leaders, I believe we can begin focusing on a narrow band of civilians whom we will more closely manage. I think

you can see the importance of taking this challenge on. It's hard to do and, in some cases, people are going to have to say that one person is better than another. This is definitely something that people shy away from doing.

Q. Why have you asked the Acquisition Career Management Advocates (ACMAs) to assist with workforce transformation and what do you expect them to accomplish?

A. I've been in this business for a while now and I didn't really know what ACMAs were and what they were supposed to do. I've met some ACMAs over the years who have been very active in trying to shape their local workforce within their responsibility, both by looking at career management and by being a source of information. In other areas, ACMAs have been almost foremen.

There's been no attempt by these ACMAs to try to reach out to the workforce or to establish themselves as a resource to help acquisition professionals move along in their careers. So if we have someone with the ACMA title and responsibility, then I must encourage and somehow support them in doing that job more effectively. The idea is to try to get them together to establish their position within the acquisition and personnel processes, and then they can help me better grow the civilian workforce leaders needed for the future.

Obviously, every place you go has a different culture and a different methodology for growing people. It shouldn't be "cookie cutter" either.

But how do we get the ACMAs to better support their populations in a positive way and go out and be proactive and help me identify some subset of the total AL&T Workforce that may want to take on additional challenges? That's the problem.

If you read the papers, there's a lot to be said about how the civil service has changed over the years and the issue of general service versus pay banding. Are we getting what we need in terms of professional government civilians who have the skill sets to effectively do their government jobs into the foreseeable future as technological demands become more complex? And so, unlike days of yore, I think we must have quality people out there who push continual education, professional develop-

ment and certification to better ensure that our workforce is qualified to be 21st-century employees. And if you think the only people who really worry about career management are located here in Washington, I don't think we can manage that many people — or influence them — from here. So we must have a cadre of people forward deployed with the workforce who can actively discuss, then influence, the career development of Army acquisition civilians.

Q. What is your current focus for change leadership and acquisition transformation initiatives in the short term?

A. I've come to realize that there's no way a small group of senior leaders can effectively manage a workforce of more than 40,000 people. So there's got to

"Transformational" means to me that our products are going to be different, but our skill sets and how we manage them will be different as well. I expect that both military and civilian leaders of this organization would begin to reflect that in their actions and management styles.

be some subset of people who we can go out and touch. And what we want that small subset of people to do is be the ones willing to stand up and be more aggressive in pursuing opportunities for PM positions and be willing to move from job to job to take on more responsibility and challenges. We must identify those folks and then determine how to provide them professional opportunities for growth.

I've listened to our workforce members when they've said, "I'd be more interested in taking on PM positions if I didn't have the mobility requirement." So I've taken the mobility requirement away. If members decide to compete for PM positions and are selected, unless they've chosen to be mobile, we will position them in an

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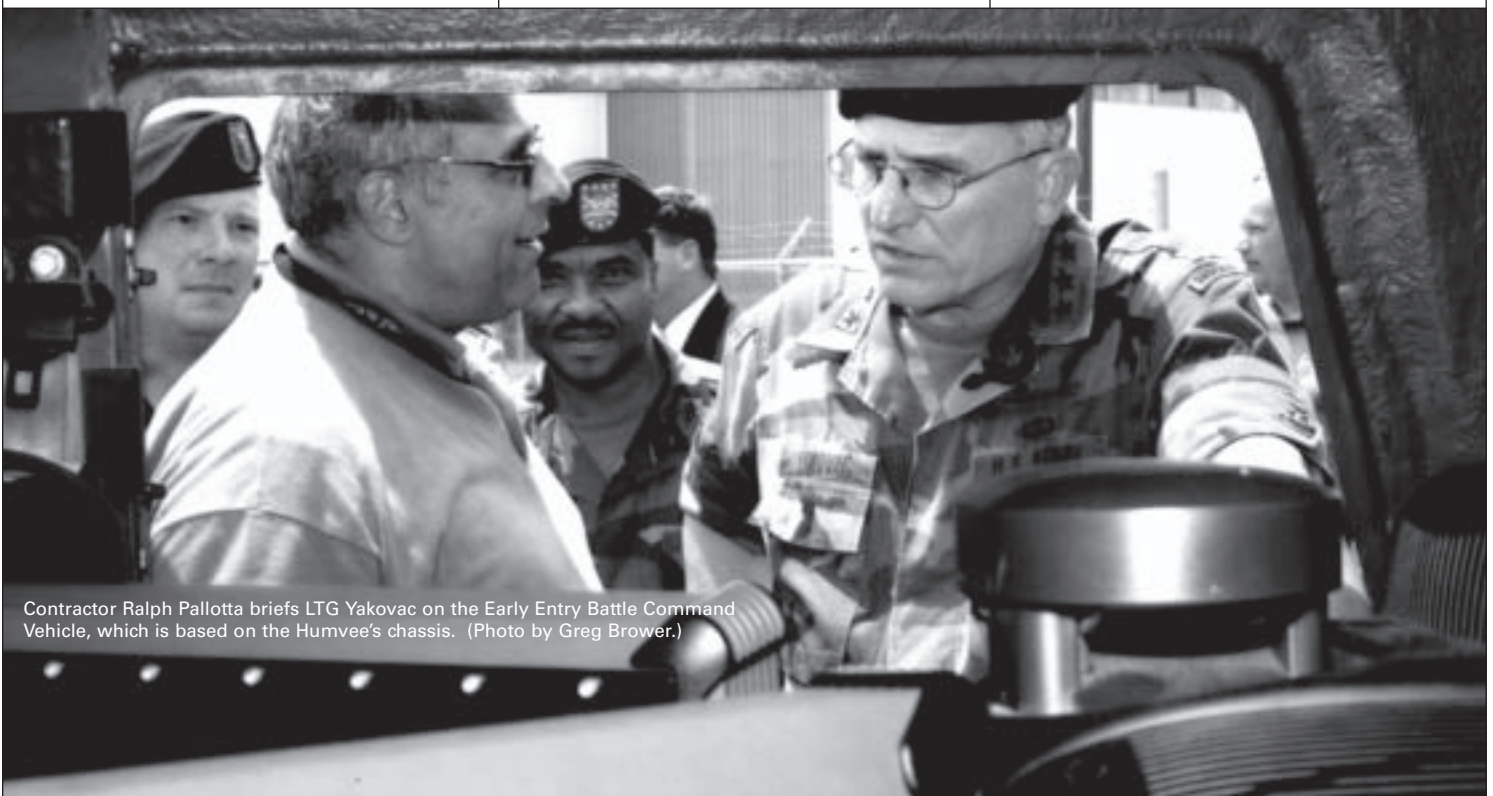
office where they've said they would like to be. It may not be the exact job, but it's in the place they said they want to be.

Military folks can retire at 20 years, but civilians can't, so once they've completed the hard jobs, what's next? Getting the local community involved, I think. If our most motivated workforce members take the hard jobs, we must continue to develop jobs that are increasingly challenging. Unfortunately, the competitive system that we're in today doesn't guarantee anyone a job, but I think there are ways we can set aside positions for people to continually give them more responsibility. That being said though, even for military officers coming out of PM positions, they don't historically go to more

challenging jobs. The difference though is that they can retire and their civilian counterparts may not be eligible yet. So there won't always be a job ladder to climb. Positions may be of equal value. However, these jobs should attempt to give employees a broader perspective as they continue to move up the management chain, while also developing a diverse background of management skills and capabilities.

Another potential inequity we've examined is the GS-14 making "X" amount of dollars who says, "If I take on a PM position, I get more responsibility without any additional money." We have the means within the current personnel system for a PEO [program executive officer] to give a civilian taking on a PM job what I would call the equivalent of a bonus or incentive. This incentive would not be permanent, but paid out during the job assignment as long as the job is performed well.

We can't give permanent promotions or pay raises, but we can, in fact, reward civilians for taking on the harder



Contractor Ralph Pallotta briefs LTG Yakovac on the Early Entry Battle Command Vehicle, which is based on the Humvee's chassis. (Photo by Greg Brower.)

acquisition jobs. We're working through that policy now and we tell PEOs that if they have a civilian PM, my idea is to give them "X" number of dollars when they start. During the time they are there, we will set objectives and, if they achieve them, under the Acquisition Demonstration Project, we can ensure that their contribution award is higher than everyone else's. And if they're successful, it clearly should be better. In this way, we can continue to move them up a bit — salary- and responsibility-wise. And in the end, if they perform well enough, we can give them another incentive of "X" dollars. These incentives are all available within our current personnel system, but we must get people to think about how to use them appropriately when the situation warrants.

We must educate people more to the fact that everything we do today is not about a single entity as an end item. It's more about integrating entities across the entire battlespace, so people must be more comfortable with understanding how to take programs that used to be very much unto themselves, but now need to be fully integrated into various technologies that interface with other programs — especially when it comes to networks. So "transformational" means to me that our products are going to be different, but our skill sets and how we manage them will be different as well. I expect that both military and civilian leaders of this organization would begin to reflect that in their actions and management styles.

For example, if you look at the PM Unit of Action [UA] that is FCS [Future Combat Systems]-phased, you see a new management structure. Within that management structure is a new way of doing business. So a product or project manager within PM UA is

not a classic product or project manager. I've asked them to think and work differently.

Likewise, we have a new Lead Systems Integrator not a prime, which changes how we do business. So, not only must we change in terms of our ability to manage complexity in technology, we must also think about a different way of working with industry and of being different than we were. When I was PM Bradley, I had a prime and I was the PM, and we did everything between us two. Today, rarely is there such a clear relationship where you have a prime and the PM and they have the relationship that I had when I was a PM.

What we're asking people to do across the battlespace is to think and act differently. This will mean contracting and funding programs differently, and growing workforces that are much more comfortable in handling more complex and diverse programs. At the end of the spectrum, we still have our classic PMs who will do what they have historically done with one-on-one relationships with the prime. In other areas, we're going to have what I call a "nontraditional relationship" either in support of another program or in a relationship with a contractor in how we're providing a capability. So leaders must change how they do business as well as how they view their roles and how they partner with industry.

Q. What is your current focus for civilian career management, post-utilization, regionalization and compensation?

A. From a civilian career management standpoint, the hardest thing here for civilians — who have much longer careers than military personnel do — is the post-utilization issue. If the expecta-

tion is that every job is going to have more responsibility than the last, I'm not sure that can ever be done workforce-wide. But, again, under a 40,000-plus population, we must identify those jobs that are more challenging than others. Once the jobs are identified, we must find ways to ensure that the people who've said they want to be more challenged get the opportunity, down the road, to take them. Again that goes against the competitive structure we now have, but I've got to believe there's a way we can provide that opportunity to those who ask for it.

Regionalization is more of a military view in which, historically, I've sent officers to specific jobs. For example, in a lot of cases, new officers come in and get their first assignment as Assistant PM [APM]

for Program X. For 3 years, the officer served as the APM for Program X. Now if Program X is a research and development (R&D) program, the officer learns a lot about R&D but nothing about procurement.

Likewise, depending on what he or she did as APM, and whether the APM

Unfortunately, the window of opportunity to access them [promotable captains and majors] is very short — between the 6- and 10-year mark. Then we have about 6 years to qualify them and get them to the point where they're competing for PM. That's not a lot of time when you throw in mandatory schooling and certification requirements.



LTG Yakovac discusses Light Combat System Survivability during his keynote address to the 24th Army Science Conference held Nov. 29 – Dec. 2, 2004, in Orlando, FL. (U.S. Army photo by Larry Shank, ARL.)

position was for a specific piece, the officer learned a lot about that piece but didn't learn anything about testing or contracting. So I must provide officers more broadly based assignments because when they become PMs, they may now, for the first time, face an R&D program. And if the only experience they ever had was in production, they are ill-prepared to do their new jobs.

My plan is simple. We must put them into a region where there are multiple opportunities to put the "personal" back in the personnel system by having that region's leader — a general officer (GO) in most cases — be responsible for developing that young officer. Rather than have an officer come to a job and perform that same job for "X" number of years, we can assign the officer to a region and over the same period of time he or she is there, rotate him through three

developmentally challenging jobs. So it's incumbent upon the GO to understand what's going on in that region and what the needs of the other people in that region are so that acquisition officers are put into jobs where they can learn and grow. This ensures that officers will have a diverse base from which they can draw upon when assigned different jobs in the future.

This program ideology doesn't pertain to lieutenant colonels and above. It's really an attempt to get a more competitive group of people in the grade of captain promotable and major who will eventually compete for product and project management positions.

Unfortunately, the window of opportunity to access them is very short — between the 6- and 10-year mark. Then we have about 6 years to qualify them — 8 in some cases — and get them to the point where they're successfully competing for PM. That's not a lot of time when you throw in mandatory schooling and certification requirements. So we must provide them with a broader based experience so that if they do get selected to be a PM, they have learned the basics and have a better foundation by which they can actually manage that program. So regionalization has more impact for the military than it currently does our civilians. The idea is to grow diverse, multitasking individuals who know more about the acquisition business.

On a day-to-day basis, most of us give the personnel business very little time, yet it is one of the most important things that we must do as leaders. But how do we do it? Typically, we let the system — the personnel system — take care of itself rather than us being actively involved in making it a more personal system. So days, weeks, months and years go by before we ask

ourselves, "When was the last time that I sat down with my young officers or civilians and asked them what they wanted to do with their careers?" If nothing else, just asking them what they want to do or what they want to be is enough for them to realize that we really care about them. I never thought about that before. They may respond with, "You want me to do what? Well, I'm willing to do that, but here are my concerns." I don't care if you call that performance counseling or just talking. It's results that really matter at the end of the day. We're so busy every day coming in and just putting out the highest flames so we don't get burned that we give very little thought about our most precious asset — people.

Because we are the government and we're a bureaucracy, we have a personnel system that we have basically put on autopilot. We hope and pray at the end of the day that this system will produce the type of leaders and managers we need for the future. In some cases it works, but I think we can do a better job of trying to put a personal touch back into the personnel system and develop better military and civilian acquisition leaders to guide the AL&T Workforce into the 21st century.

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